

Castlemaine Naturalist

May 2020

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Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Grey Shrike-thrush, a 'backyard bird' of late
photo by Noel Young

I hope you are all coping with the social deprivation imposed on us by the pandemic. I think an interest in the natural world puts us at an advantage because the nature around us is not affected by the virus and carries on regardless. As I write this, it is looking hopeful that some of the restrictions will soon be lifted. We may then be able to drive or walk to our favourite bush locations without feeling guilty of breaking the rules. Maybe even with the company of a friend. But returning to having meetings and club excursions looks some way off, so we are having to find other means of communication.

Fortunately the electronic age gives us plenty. Just about everyone now has some kind of internet connected gadget. Half of us are already getting this newsletter on line, and congratulations to the many members who have offered interesting photo observations this month. Your committee is striving to find other ways of keeping the show together, and conducted a successful business meeting in April via the Zoom app. Speakers are being sought for on-line presentations.

Euan Moore has prior experience with conferencing apps, and has volunteered to bring his presentation forward to substitute the May meeting using Zoom. (Details are on the back page). We found it quite easy for participants to log on, but to ensure security you need to be registered so you can be "invited" to join by the convenor just prior to the meeting. This involves a password supplied by the convenor and a small download. Usual meeting time – 7.30 on May 8.

Other clubs are already doing online presentations, and Geraldine has provided links to Ballarat's on page 11. On this theme I have been tuning in to Andrew Skeoch's morning bushwalks around his bush property near Newstead recorded on his phone and transmitted via Facebook. Andrew's business is "Listening Earth" - search the Facebook page under that name.

Finally a couple of things to note. Euan is currently revising Tony Morton's butterfly notes on our website, and would like to receive good photos of any on the list. More info next time. Send to calamanthus5@bigpond.com Photographers will be credited. And we now have a dedicated address for contributions to the newsletter: newsletter.cfnc@gmail.com Deadline for the June edition is May 29

Stay well - NY

Plant Identification in an Online World

Euan Moore

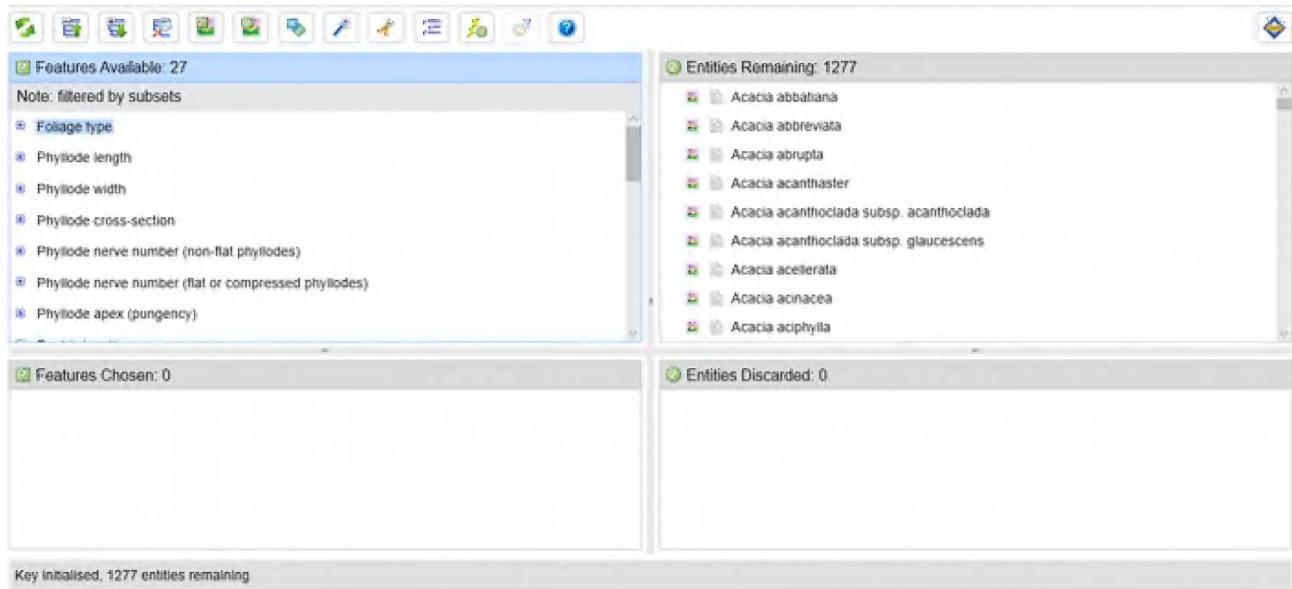
Many of us have spent hours trying to identify plants using the identification keys in books such as the four volume Flora of Victoria. These keys are often frustrating to use. For example, you might have a piece of the plant, a flower and a few leaves, and you happily work through the key until you are asked to decide between characteristics of the fruiting body which you don't have – so you have either come to a dead end or face the laborious stepping down each path that is offered.

In recent years most of the State flora books have been made available online. In addition there are a number of other web sites that provide useful plant identification tools using Lucid™ technology that helps get around the problem of missing information.

One of the Lucid keys that I have found very useful is 'Wattle, Acacias of Australia' which I will describe in more detail.

To use the key, click on the link

<https://apps.lucidcentral.org/wattle/text/intro/index.html> and select 'Identify' from the home page (there are other options on that page that you may like to explore later) and then 'Continue' on the next page. You will be presented with a screen that looks like this:



This key accesses a database of 1277 species of Acacia across Australia.

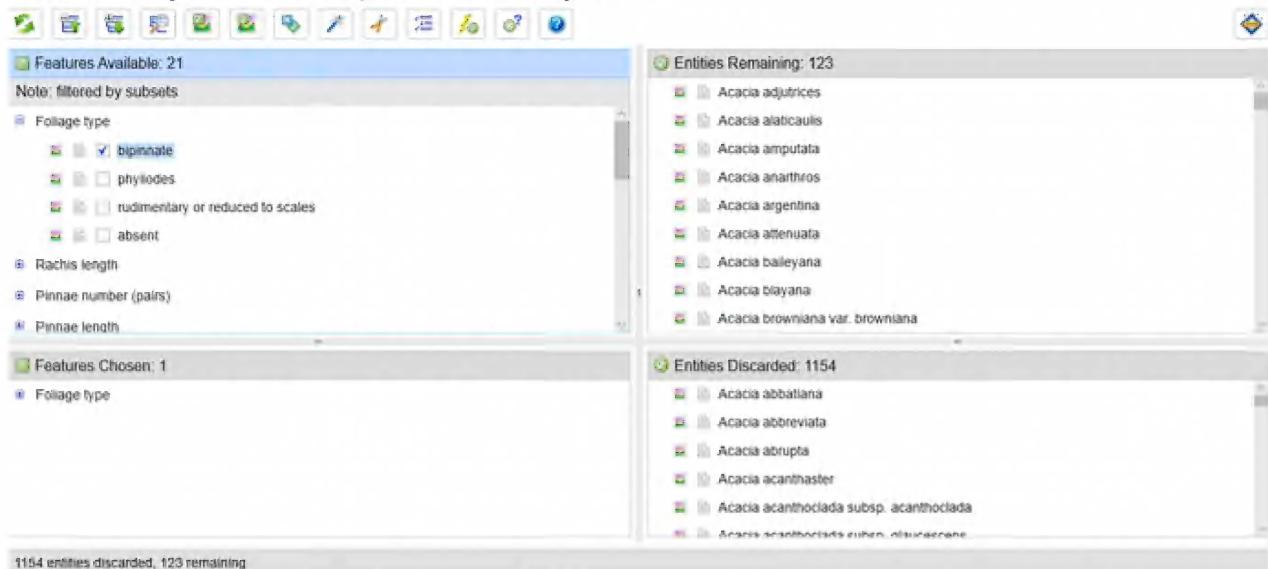
The top left box has a list of attributes that you may select in order to identify your specimen. The top right box contains a list of species.

As you select the attributes of your specimen, these will be listed in the lower left box (Features Chosen) and species without those attributes will be eliminated and be listed in the lower right box (Entities Discarded).

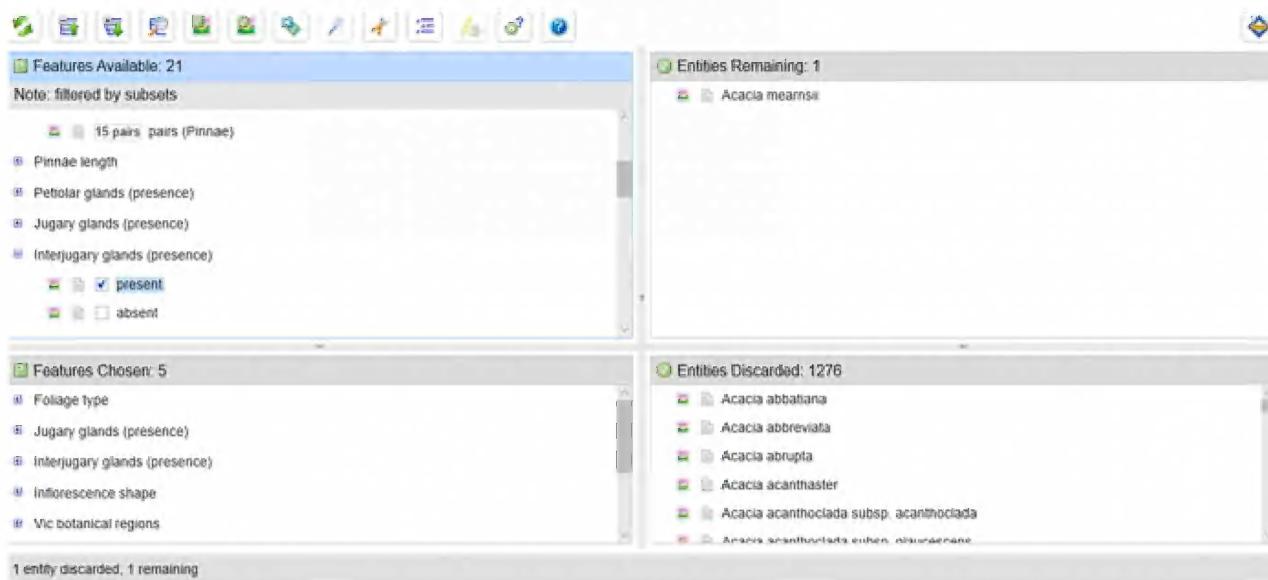
Beside each attribute is a small picture symbol and a text symbol. Click on these to get a picture and definition of the attribute respectively. This means that you don't

need to understand the technical jargon to use the key. Similarly for the species list (Entities Remaining) in the right hand box, clicking on the picture and text symbols will open a picture and description of the species respectively.

In the image below I have selected ‘Foliage Type – Bipinnate’ and immediately reduced my number of possibilities by 90%.



By selecting the botanical region (Victorian Midlands) from the list of attributes, I further reduced the possibilities to 10. By selecting additional characteristics related to leaf size and structure I was able to key to my sample, *Acacia mearnsii* (Black Wattle), with as few as five attributes.



Obviously not all specimens will key out as quickly as this and even if you become stuck, by this time you are usually down to a handful of possibilities that can be checked by clicking on the species images and descriptions.

While most of us are restricted to our gardens or immediate neighbourhoods I urge you to step outside, pick a sprig from one of the wattles that are coming into flower and give it a try.

There are a number of other keys of this type available for some of the larger

groups of plants. They all operate in a similar way. Some are still a work in progress and may not have all the plant descriptions or glossary pictures available but are still a very useful aid to plant identification.

Others to try are:

The Pea Key – a favourite which can identify some 1500 species of pea flowers, Australia wide. <https://www.anbg.gov.au/cpbr/cd-keys/peakey/key/The%20Pea%20Key/Media/Html/index.html>

Euclid – Eucalypts of Australia

<https://apps.lucidcentral.org/euclid/text/intro/index.html>

From the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne:

Key to the Eucalypts of Victoria <https://vicflora.rbg.vic.gov.au/matrix-keys/eucalypts/>

Multi-access key to the Asteraceae of Victoria

<https://vicflora.rbg.vic.gov.au/static/keys/asteraceae>

These last two are part of VicFlora <https://vicflora.rbg.vic.gov.au/> the online Flora of Victoria which is the go-to place for current information about Victorian flora.

Flora guides from other states can also be useful for providing alternative keys and descriptions.

PlantNET – NSW Flora Online <http://plantnet.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/floraonline.htm>

eFloraSA – Electronic Flora of South Australia <http://www.flora.sa.gov.au/>

Key to Tasmanian Vascular Plants -

<https://www.utas.edu.au/dicotkey/dicotkey/key.htm> Published by University of Tasmania. A very simple to use key with photographic examples at each step. Quite useful also for southern Victoria.

Observations April (1942)

George Broadway

At this unprecedented time (how often has that word been used this year)! of confinement to barracks and self-isolation, it is difficult to get out and about to make our observations. I am constrained to gazing at the garden through the window where I am entertained by the flock of New Holland Honeyeaters constantly flitting around the garden flying from one Correa to the next. Yesterday as I was gazing at the N.H's I was thinking why does the Yellow-faced Honeyeater which I can hear calling from next door spurn my Correas and other species specially planted to attract birds, when suddenly there it was, on the bird bath. Unfortunately it continued to ignore all the blossom on the Correas and soon took off. It was soon replaced by a flock of Silveryeyes who were in turn evicted by the New Hollands, who ruled the roost (bath), until the arrival of a male blackbird, which occupied the centre of the bath where it alternated between standing staring down the New Hollands, and vigorously bathing and splashing water. There is a large bath in the back garden which is the Blackbirds domain, the smaller one in the front garden is meant for the smaller birds, although it is not infrequently visited by Magpies and Ravens.

My other observation this month is to do with ants, those fairly large ones which build those large nests with multiple entrances. On my (lonely) walks I have watched the trail of ants coming and going to and fro from these nests.

Relative to their size they must walk the equivalent of several miles on their journeys, but rarely do I see one carrying anything. Ants are scurrying in both directions empty-handed so I wonder why they must expend so much energy on what seems to be a fruitless exercise. Does anyone have any ideas ?

I suppose that driving out to the bush to observe wildlife would be considered by the Law to be non essential; take note of the young girl fined \$1600 for having a driving lesson. So instead let us look at what people were observing in April 1942. It is interesting that there was virtually no mention of the war although 1942 was in the blackest period for Australia.

Mr Richards of Belgrave had swatted a fly, one however with a fairly long flattened body and very strongly developed hind legs. Although the insect was obviously dead, the ovipositor continued to lay eggs. The reply was that it was a Soldier Fly, *Neoexaireta spinigera* of the family *Stratiomyidae*. The legs look like those of a miniature grasshopper and its food is other insects. The eggs are laid on the edge of a pond and the carnivorous larvae live in water or damp earth.

Insects

Horsham: Firewood or Longicorn Beetle, *Phoracantha tricuspis*. Frequently mentioned in these pages. Nov '16 +

Horsham: Your beetles belong to a numerous family, difficult to identify individually but known generally as Cockchafers, either *Heteronyx* or *Scitala*. They frequently swarm on fruit trees and eat all the leaves making a noise like a swarm of bees. They often swarm at night around a light.

Horsham: (All apparently members of the same family). The Cabbage White butterflies do seem to have "gone off". They seem to be half as numerous now as they threatened to be.

Brunswick : There are a number of flies and and wasps which prey on flies. Your specimen was a Robber fly, a type which takes flies on the wing, sucks out the juices, then drops the carcase. A few of these will clear a locality quite quickly, the prey flies seem to realize and depart for safer climes. Would that there were more robber flies around my bush camps.

Glen Waverley: Your beetle was a *Trogodentron*. It has as yet no common name. It preys on other insects. Identified by the restless orange antennae, dark grey body and jumping movement. Harmless but can give a nip.

Kanya: (Between Stawell and St Arnaud) A *Tachinid* fly whose larvae are parasites on the caterpillars of other insects

Vermont: Striped caterpillar of the Wanderer Butterfly which has followed the Swan Plant from its home in Central America to the gardens of the world. The caterpillar turns into a beautiful jade-green pendant chrysalis spotted with gold. Dec '16

Minyip: An immature bug of some kind but not a bed bug. Belongs to the group of *Fulgoroides*, plant hoppers.

Frankston: Your specimens which looked like a fruit or seed on the wattle twigs are actually a scale insect, the Wattle Berry Scale. The large ones with the dark spot are the females which spend their whole lives attached to the twig whose sap they suck. See Oct '18

Carlton: Caterpillar of the Drinker Moth, *Pinara*. See Dec'16

Balwyn: Tree Cricket or Long-horned Grasshopper. May'18

Mt Eliza (Children's Hospital) Tree Cricket or Long-horned Grasshopper. Has enormous jaws for eating wood, but otherwise harmless. May'18

Bacchus Marsh: Brilliant females of the Mountain Grasshopper, *Acridopeza reticulata*. The males are like a normal grasshopper but the short, plump females have only grey useless wing cases which raise in time of danger displaying the vivid "frightening" colours, red, blue and black on the upper side of the abdomen. Feb'20

Dandenong: A young Ladybird beetle. The young are rather grub-like and do not get their wings until they are quite grown up. Jun'17

Fitzroy: Termites or White Ants. At certain stages a generation is born with wings. These swarm and fly away to form new colonies. Arsenic is recommended. (This in 1942)

Wonthaggi: Chrysalis of the Australian Admiral Butterfly, a beautifully sculptured pendant of metallic gold colour. May'18

Birchip: Immature Crusader Bug, recognized by the characteristic hind legs. As an adult it will have the white cross of St Andrew on its back. Sucks the sap from young shoots causing them to wither and die. Nov'17

Spiders

Armadale: White-tailed spider, a frequent inhabitant of dwellings. Quite harmless. Dec '17

Malvern: Another Orchard or bird-dropping spider. Frequently mentioned in these pages.
Jun'16 +

Box Hill: *Isopeda*, Huntsman Spider, so called because it catches its prey, flies, etc. by running them down or jumping on them.

Oakleigh: Black House Spider, which makes its web in forgotten corners of woodsheds, garden sheds, workshops, etc.. Fearsome looking but not dangerous. Uses the thick web to catch flies.

Pakenham: Grey Wolf Spider, which lives in burrows in the ground, sometimes with a rough hinged lid, although it is not a trapdoor spider.

Kinglake: Orb-spinner, *Epeira*, a harmless garden spider.

General

Wonthaggi: Tech School Nature Club. You were correct. It was the Forked Greenhood, *Pterostylis furcata*.

Lavers Hill: The snake was about a metre in length, stout, dark brown behind the head, toning to light brown near the tail. It was a Copperhead, second to the Tiger Snake as the most dangerous in southern Victoria.

Members observations

Euan Moore

A pair of Bark-Mimicking Grasshopper, *Coryphistes ruricola*, who were a bit easier to see when not on rough tree bark. This is a widespread species which I have also found in the desert country of far north South Australia.

Also a pair of Black and White Tiger Moth, *Spilosoma glatignyi*, found on rocks where I was about to work in the garden. It was a cool morning so they were in a state of torpor. I'm not sure if the difference in pattern is sexual dimorphism or just part of the normal variation between individuals. These moths are fairly common. The larvae feed on a variety of plants, both native and exotic including *Pinus radiata*. (Marriot, P. Moths of Victoria, Part 2)



Marli Wallace

April 7:

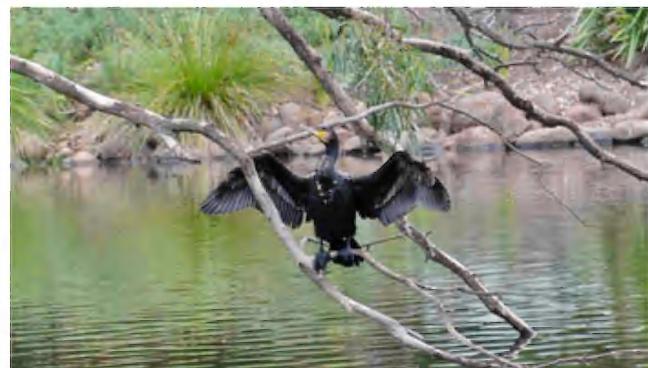
Today I visited the Castlemaine Botanic Gardens. It is the beginning of an exciting fungi display mainly *Phylloporus clelandii* near the Tea Rooms. I have no doubt there is more to come with the rain.

On the same day I inspected Lake Joanna and the usual suspects were there – a black-faced





Great Cormorant drying its wings and four Masked Lapwings holding a meeting.



Sunday April 13:

At the foot of The Monk, immature Autumn Greenhood (*Pterostylis revoluta*) near the Goldfields Track sign post and a mature specimen on the lower right-hand side.

Dianne Thompson

Ochrogaster lunifer or processionary caterpillars, larvae of the bag shelter moth, seeking shelter for the night on our stone wall.



Rosemary and Peter Turner, and Judy Hopley

Raining moths?

On 16th April, walking down the central path at the Botanical Gardens, between the playground and the teahouse, Rosemary noticed several brown pupal cases on (and emerging from) holes in the ground. At first we thought cicadas – but that didn't seem right. Euan Moore identified them as the pupal cases of *Trictena atripalpis* - Rain Moths. Then we received an email from Judy with photos of a very large grey moth hanging on a nectarine leaf, and the next day a large brown on a flyscreen – which Euan confirmed are the female and male *atripalpis*. Back in the CBG on April 20th, we found more cases in the same area, near two Red Gums.

Trictena atripalpis, Rain Moth, is in the *Hepialidae* family. The female is larger than the male with wingspan about 160 mm compared to about 120 mm. Many 1000's of eggs are laid or dropped on the ground near eucalypts, and the larvae dig into the ground, living in tunnels for several years feeding on tree roots, especially Red Gum *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*. The adult moths emerge from the pupal cases, usually after rain (hence the name – we had good rain on 4th April), and find a tree trunk to rest on while their wings spread and dry out. They only live for a few days, to find a mate and for the female to spread the next generation of eggs. An interesting article on Rain Moths is on the Sanctuary Lakes website below.

Our thanks to Euan Moore for his help in identification.

References: Entry on *Trictena atripalpis* in [Atlas of Living Australia](#)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trictena_atripalpis

<https://www.sanctuarylakesresort.com.au/index.php/publications/natures-rubik/184-natures-rubick-the-rain-moth>

Photos below: Female (JH); male (JH); pupal case (PT)
Right: pupal case in hole (PT)



Geraldine Harris - Nature notes at Barkers Creek.

28/3/20 Tree Martins (15-20) flying over head and then resting high in top of tree. European wasps swarming on dead kangaroo.

29/3 Wedge-tailed Eagle, Black Kite, Brown Treecreeper, Red-rumped Parrot.

We went for a walk to look at the fuel reduction burn along the Pipeline track at Barkers creek. Seemed like a good cool burn - only found one Tall Bluebell flowering (photos).

30/4/20 Small St John's Wort *Hypericum gramineum* flowering in bush paddock.

Caper White butterflies in garden. Birds of prey flying overhead of an evening. Giant Boletus *Phlebopus marginatus* in paddock.

30/3 Sitting at my desk, my attention was drawn by a Willy Wagtail that flew in and hovered in front of the window, I presumed it was looking for insects. In the same instant, many small birds, in succession, flew into this small corner of garden; Superb Fairy Wrens, Red-browed Finch, White-browed Scrubwren, New Holland Honeyeater, White-plumed Honeyeater and a Grey Shrike-thrush. And as I stared in amazement a Yellow-footed Antechinus ran out from under a bush, back and forwards over the rocks and then climbed up and over the brick veranda wall and disappeared. Just as quickly all the birds flew away, including the Willy Wagtail, and the garden was still again. Was this an omen; was there a raptor overhead; I do not know. (sunny autumn day, 4mls rain the previous day)

2/4/20 21 mls rain

3/4/20 9 mls rain. Jarrod inspecting rain in race - found a tree struck by lightning in the recent storms. You can see where it struck a limb and followed it down into the trunk of the tree that must have exploded. There was debris from the tree scattered widely about - one large piece of wood had been thrown 40m away from the tree!

4/4/20 49mls of rain - Yipee!

13/4/20 Young Red-bellied Black Snake (photo) at the front of our house. Also seen this week - a young Blue-tongue, young Shingleback, young skinks - but Autumn not Spring? Red Spider-mites active in bush. Dams filling. Altocumulus clouds (cotton wool clouds).

16/4/20 Jarrod came over the hill and disturbed 4 Wedge-tailed Eagles on the ground and they took off and 5 Whistling Kites appeared and harassed the Wedgies and then some Magpies joined in too. Varied Sittellas and Spotted Pardalotes on our walk in the bush.

17/4/20 Crested Shrike-tit in garden at pond, also a single Goldfinch along creek. European Honey bees, Hover fly (*Ischiodon* sp.) and Meadow Argus (photo) and Common Grass-blue on *Thryptomene saxicola*, *Thomasia petalocalyx*, *Westringia crassifolia* and on *Xerochrysum viscosum* in garden.

18/4/20 Yellow-footed Antechinus appeared outside window running about in the garden again.

23/4/20 Riley and Kate found a bolete and an echidna in our house yard. Yellow-footed Antechinus hopping about outside study window again. Silver-eyes flying in and out of fruit trees. Geoff heard a Fan-tailed Cuckoo calling this morning.

24/4/20 Three Sulphur-crested Cockatoos drinking from the birdbaths at the back of our house - and then one came and perched on our pagoda and started to eat the rotting beams.

1 Cool, Patchy fuel reduction burn along Pipeline Track at Barkers Creek.



2 Tall Bluebell (*Wahlenbergia stricta*) was the only flowering plant we found after the burn.





3 Red-bellied Black Snake (40cm) at front of house.

4 Meadow Argus on Whipstick Westringia (*Westringia crassifolia*).

5 Grey Mistletoe (*Amyema quandang* var *quandang*) with it's upturned flowers on Silver Wattle (*Acacia dealbata*).

Damian Kelly

Re-run of Hitchcocks' 'The Birds'

We live just near Urquhart Street where there are a lot of eucalypts that are currently in flower. The noise is quite something from first thing in the morning and the range of species is remarkable. I have tried to count birds, but the cacophony and endless movement has made this impossible.



There are:

Red Wattlebirds in the dozens; Rainbow Lorikeets; Musk Lorikeets; A few Blue-faced Honeyeaters; A lot of New Holland Honeyeaters; A few Yellow-faced Honeyeaters; And surprisingly, several Pied Currawongs that keep arriving and exploring the foliage (for insects?)

Others can probably add a few more. I wouldn't be surprised to see other lorikeets and honeyeaters and (dream on) maybe a Swift Parrot?

- Musk Lorikeet



Blue-faced Honeyeater

Noel Young

Backyard observing

With a bit more time at home than usual, I watch lots of avian visitors come through. Daily arrivals include New Holland Honeyeaters, House sparrows, Blackbirds, Yellow-rumped Thornbills, Fairy-wrens, Silvereys, Wattlebirds, Crimson Rosellas, Magpie, and occasionally Red-browed Finches, Weebill, Brown Thornbill, Grey Shrike-thrush, Eastern Rosella, Rufous Whistler and S-c Cockatoos.

In late January I noticed increasingly frequent visits to my backyard of a pair of Common Bronzewing Pigeons. As they were obviously very chummy I suspected they might have a nest in the area, but they must also have decided it was a safe place for intended purposes.

On 9th February the male was seen accompanied by a fledgeling [photo 1] and was seen feeding it. Later a second chick appeared, and the two appeared to have been parked in the yard for safe-keeping. The first and larger of the two was a male, and the new arrival a female. The adult male would appear at intervals and a mad dance would ensue as the siblings vied for whatever tidbit was offered. [ph 2]

Once both chicks were present, the adult female was not seen again. I watched the adult male teach them to find seeds as they followed behind pecking at the ground. As time went on he spent less time with them, but kept an eye on them until they were advanced enough to fly off – first the young male, and a few days later the younger sibling. It is always an insight to observe behaviour over a period of time, and wonderful if you can do it from the kitchen window!



1. Dad with the first chick



2. The feeding dance



Stretch exercise in the sun.



Two's company

On line Presentations - metamorphosis

Geraldine Harris

Prior to Covid-19, Bill Elder and Andrew Arnold, from the Ballarat FNC, were working a presentation on 'Metamorphosis' to present at the April club meeting. Instead they have issued a link to make the presentation available via members' computers. What you will see is PowerPoint slides with commentary.

<https://www.screencast.com/t/RKv24Lpp72>

A few days later Bill shared another link of a really good short video that describes the process in butterflies and moths. Bill said, "I think you'll find it complements my talk from last month and helps give a good understanding of the last phase of complete metamorphosis."

<https://www.screencast.com/t/RKv24Lpp72>

<https://www.labroots.com/trending/plants-and-animals/15714/heres-happens-inside-caterpillar-s-chrysalis?fbclid=IwAR2vTu1TRlvW03HNHwiS7xq6bZWuBqFfT1I0wHI0mkmzn2RmiwG49go6Ahg>

Geoff and I have watched both and they are very good.

I have also contacted Bill and he is very happy for us to share the links in our may newsletter.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

CFNC May meeting (via Zoom) Wilderness Islands – Fauna and Flora of the NZ Sub-Antarctic

Our speaker for the May meeting will be **Euan Moore**, presenting for the first time to the club via Zoom. Euan and his partner Jenny Rolland travelled to the NZ Sub-Antarctic Islands last November with Heritage Expeditions. Euan will describe the fascinating flora and fauna of these islands. They comprise seven isolated island groups to the south and east of NZ, each with their own endemic fauna and flora. Only one group, cool temperate Chatham Islands is permanently inhabited while the southern-most, Macquarie, has a Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service and ANARE research base. All the other islands are uninhabited and in some cases have never had humans present for more than a few days at a time.

These islands are home to ten of the world's 18 species of penguin, 12 of 22 species of albatross and (along with the NZ mainland) a third of the world's cormorants. There are many seabirds around all the islands with breeding colonies on many, and while few in number, those land birds that are present are often endemic species or sub-species. Seals, sea-lions and whales occur on, around and between the islands.

The flora is most similar to the montane flora of NZ however most islands have endemic or near endemic species including the spectacular mega-herbs. On several islands the flora and fauna are recovering following the successful eradication of introduced mammals.



***Registration for the meeting**

This talk will be conducted as a Zoom webinar at 7.30 on Friday May 8. If you wish to attend please email munroDSL@iinet.net.au and provide your name and, if not a CFNC member, please indicate how you heard of the talk. Logon details to enable you to join the webinar will be sent to you close to the time of the talk.

General meetings and Field Trips have been suspended until further notice.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, are being conducted online.

Club website (Web master: Ron Wescott) - <http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/>

Castlemaine Naturalist - email newsletter material to: newsletter.cfnc@gmail.com

Subscriptions for 2020

Ordinary membership: Single \$35, Family \$50

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